

The Challenge to Revisionism

Editorial

[Richard A. Widmann](#)

With the launch of a new historical journal, one devoted specifically to inconvenient history, history that challenges and at times may make us uncomfortable, we must look back at that first generation of self-named revisionist historians and their intellectual victories and challenges. Although the case has been made that revisionist history is as old as history itself, for at its heart it means nothing more or less than to reveal the truth about historical matters – ripping off the veil of "official" history and government spun propaganda, the term really took root in the years following the First World War.

The revisionists were aptly named, as they sought to revise the harshest elements of the Treaty of Versailles and specifically the German sole war-guilt clause. This movement became immensely popular among liberals and progressives of the time. Although it was understood that the principal objective of the earliest generation of revisionists was to establish historical facts about the origins and methods of World War One, it was also believed that with such understanding future wars could be prevented. The revisionists believed that the popular acceptance of the true causes of the horrible conflict that came to be known as 'The Great War' would generate a public reluctance to be lied into a subsequent conflict. The revisionist movement was a peace movement.

With the publication in 1935 of Walter Millis', *Road to War: America 1914-1917*, the revisionists believed that they had won the intellectual war for historical accuracy. Such a judgment, proved to be premature however. Although many revisionists were drawn to and otherwise supported anti-interventionist groups in the years leading up to Pearl Harbor, the events of that day virtually eliminated any popular acceptance of revisionism.

Before the 1940s would come to an end revisionists began to challenge various aspects of the origins and conduct of the Allies in the second great conflict of a generation. John T. Flynn, F.J.P. Veale, Freda Utey, Leonard von Mural, and George Morgenstern wrote scholarly volumes that shattered many popular myths of wartime developed propaganda.

By the 1950's Harry Elmer Barnes, a revisionist of the First World War came to be the epicenter of a new generation of revisionists who sought to get a proper understanding of the British role in the events of September 1939 and to establish whether Franklin Roosevelt lied us into the Second World War through the "back door" at Pearl Harbor. The revisionists were fearful of the treatment of enemy combatants in war crimes trials for the moral of the day appeared to be no greater than "might makes right" and that the great crime of any modern conflict was now to be on the losing side. The revisionists were also fearful of the new terrible weapons that were part of the world's arsenals including the nuclear bomb. It was thought that a third world conflict would result in mutual annihilation of both sides.

Despite the depth of historical research and the number of volumes which were written in the 1950s, the revisionists of the Second World War found that popular acceptance of their theories was going to be far more difficult than in the years following World War One. In what Barnes would call the 'historical blackout' publishers would simply reject revisionist writings. The liberal and left-wing magazines which

led the charge in the 1920's wanted nothing to do with an accurate portrayal of the Fascist, Communist or National Socialist regimes.

For the most part, the revisionist volumes of the 1950s were published by two small publishers, Henry Regnery of Chicago and Devin-Adair of New York. When noticed by reviewers, the comments were almost always negative.

In 1966, Barnes summed up the situation for World War Two revisionism up to that time in an article, "Revisionism: A Key to Peace" that he wrote for the *Rampart Journal*. He declared that "the historical and factual battle of revisionism has been won." But Barnes also recognized, "the extensive revisionist literature on which this has been based and that which will be presented later on must be regarded for the time being as existing mainly for the record, prior to the time when historical facts can reach the public, unimpeded by censorship, mendacity, favoritism, and fraud."

Barnes developed the term "historical smotherout" to explain the technique and strategy to prevent revisionist writing from gaining mass acceptance. Identifying its origins at the Eichmann trial of 1961, Barnes described the smotherout strategy "the fundamental aim has now become to emphasize the allegation that Hitler and the national socialist leaders were such vile, debased, brutal, and bloodthirsty gangsters that Great Britain had an overwhelming moral obligation to plan a war to exterminate them, and the United States was compelled to enter this conflict to aid and abet this British crusade because of a moral imperative that could not be evaded to engage in a campaign of political, social, and cultural sanitation."

Barnes argued that revisionist theories were smothered by a campaign of unceasing inflammatory exaggerations of Nazi savagery. In light of the incessant tales of the murder of six million Jews and the use of terrible weapons of mass destruction including gas chambers that killed by the thousands in a matter of minutes, some might even say seconds, the details of backroom politics and diplomatic failures were hardly the things that would fire the public's imagination. Barnes wrote, "To expect the public to listen to sober revisionist scholarship in the face of the current avalanche of violent vituperation against prewar and wartime Germany is like imagining a housewife whose home is on fire and the flames threatening her small children, being eager or even willing to open her door to a Fuller Brush salesman and listen intently to his sales talk."

Barnes recognized that revisionism faced its greatest challenge from the overwhelming smotherout of atrocity tales and what would eventually come to be known as the Holocaust story. The Holocaust story over the past 50 years has developed into mythical proportions and is defended by an entire industry that has developed around it as well as a legal system which persecutes those who question any aspect of what has come to be the "official" account.

Barnes properly identified the Holocaust story as the true barrier to the acceptance of revisionist arguments and thereby the true barrier to peace, security and prosperity among nations. The specter of the Holocaust is marched out to justify every modern military intervention. The media and the government depict our 'enemies' as modern day Hitlers intent on committing genocide and planning to use their secretive arsenals of weapons of mass destruction.

Cutting through the exaggerations, lies and propaganda of the Holocaust story has to be the starting ground for any contemporary revisionist. The territory is plagued with the minefield of charges of

"Holocaust denial," "racism," "anti-Semitism," and "neo-Nazism." Despite the persecution and insults, revisionists understand that the myths of the Holocaust have smothered out a proper and accurate understanding of the Second World War.

Far from attempting to rehabilitate any totalitarian regime, we seek to emerge in a society that is freer than the one we live in today. We seek to reveal the facts in an effort to avoid foreign wars and interventionist crusades that leave tens of thousands dead. Over forty years ago, Barnes was frustrated by the smothering out of revisionism; we intend to pick up his banner from where it fell and continue the struggle. *Inconvenient History* is not for the squeamish and may not leave you feeling very comfortable, but if you believe as Barnes did and as we do, that revisionism is the key to peace, you've come to the right place.

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